



Susan Scholefield, CMG, Chartered FCIPD
Director General Human Resources & Corporate Services
MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Level 6 Zone D Main Building Whitehall LONDON SW1A 2HB
Telephone: 020 7218 6833 Fax: 020 7218 3371
Email: DGHRCS-Private Office@mod.uk

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Mr Simon Webb
Civil Contingencies Secretariat
Cabinet Office
22 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2WH

Dear Simon,

REVIEW OF THE RESPONSE TO THE 2009 INFLUENZA PANDEMIC: CALL FOR EVIDENCE

Your letter of 12 March 2010 invited comments on the areas of inquiry for the review of the response to Swine Flu.

As you may be aware, MOD participated in all CCC and CCC(O) meetings, albeit as interested observers for the majority of the time rather than playing a leading role in the response to the pandemic. Internally, we mirrored the proceedings at CCC/CCC(O), with the establishment of a senior level pan-MOD Flu Group and a Crisis Management Team, who were responsible for co-ordinating the Defence response to Swine Flu in accordance with our Pandemic Influenza Framework. We have recently completed our own lessons identified exercise (which will be used to update and develop the MOD Framework), and would offer the following general observations on the wider UK response:

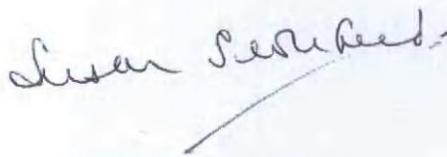
- CCC(O) and CCC worked effectively – no doubt helped by the considerable amount of cross-Government pandemic influenza planning and policy development work undertaken over the past four or five years, although the interface with the Devolved Administrations did not always seem to run quite so smoothly;
- we found the CRIP and FAQs to be extremely valuable sources of information;

- the arrangements with the Department of Health for agreeing and delivering MOD's requirements for anti-virals and vaccines worked well;
- where possible, it would be helpful if CCS could ensure there is a reasonable gap between the CCC(O) and CCC meetings, so that staff can brief Ministers/officials attending the latter. We coped with the occasional very short turn-around time, but it could have been more difficult to manage if the pandemic had had a more severe impact on the UK. Likewise, Committee papers need to be issued early enough to enable attendees to have considered them before the meetings;
- it would be helpful if Committee papers, Action Lists, CRIPs, Media Briefings etc could come out under one standard distribution list, to help Departments manage the flow of information from CCS; and,
- it would perhaps have been a good discipline for the CCC(O) to reference back to the National Flu Framework and the COBR Pandemic Response Plan every so often (even if Swine Flu was different enough from the presumed impact of an avian influenza pandemic that some of the issues might not have been applicable), not least to avoid any suggestion that we had a plan but then didn't use it.

While Swine Flu may not (so far) have turned out to be the pandemic we feared, it has raised awareness of the threat of pandemic influenza and the importance of Business Continuity in MOD, and has provided a useful test of our planning and preparedness in relatively benign circumstances. Our next challenge will be to ensure that we learn the lessons of Swine Flu, and maintain and build on the current levels of awareness and planning, so that we are prepared for whichever pandemic comes next.

If we can assist in any way with your review, please let me know – or ask your Review Team to make contact with [REDACTED], who leads for me on pandemic influenza planning.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Susan Sedgwick". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.